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ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE A23
NEW YORK TIMES
22 January 1986

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The Hash Bashers

Eight men met secretly in Washington.

They were the Hash-Settling Committee of the National Security Council.

Their job: to settle the hash of foreign troublemakers.

Since their work was top secret, the press always referred to them as "the hush-hush Hash-Settling Committee."

The chairman opened the meeting by pointing to a map of North Africa. He said, "Who can guess the name of a troublemaker in this part of the world who needs his hash settled?"

"Qaddafi," the man from the Treasury said.

The other members laughed.

"Qaddafi?" said the chairman. "What kind of name is Qaddafi? Has anyone else here heard of this Qaddafi?"

The Treasury man was abashed. If the press had seen him, he would have been referred to as "an abashed hush-hush hash settler." Or possibly "a hush-hush abashed hash settler."

He said he had read about a Qaddafi in The New York Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor and The New Yorker magazine.

The chairman said, "Tush tush," provoking the White House man to interrupt.

"Careful," he said, "or the press will say an abashed hash settler was tush-tushed by the hush-hush Hash-Settling Committee."

The Pentagon man spoke: "While the committee quibbles about a nonentity named Qaddafi, the insufferable Qadhafi's hash becomes more insolent by the hour."

"Whose hash did you say?" asked the C.I.A. man.

"Qadhafi's hash," said the Pentagon man. "Don't you read The Wall Street Journal and U.S. News & World Report? If you did you'd know about Qadhafi."

The C.I.A. man wanted to flush with anger but didn't.

He feared the Pentagon man would leak to the press, which would call him a flushed hush-hush hash settler.

He could imagine the Pentagon man leaking a story about crushing a C.I.A. man who hadn't heard of Qadhafi's hash.

He could even foresee the headline: "Expert Crushes Flushed Hush-Hush Hash Settler."

So, calmly he said, "If the military want to settle the hash of one Qadhafi, let them first answer a question: How do you pronounce 'qadh'?"

The room fell silent.

"Exactly," said the C.I.A. man.

"Enough of this mush," said the State Department man. While the committee argued about Qaddafi and Qadhafi, there was an obnoxious man, well known to all readers of The Economist, who was just begging to have his hash settled.

"Name him!" everyone shouted.

"Quaddafi," said the man from State.

"Bosh," said the man from the Justice Department. "You cookie-pushing diplomats come in here saying we speak mush, then you point us to some British Foreign Office villain named Quaddafi."

"Gentlemen," said the chairman, "if this gets to the press they will say that a cookie pusher's 'mush' was 'boshed' in a hush-hush hash clash."

All eight men wanted to do something brash, but no one dared. Suppose the press said you were splashily brash about hush-hush hash-settling decisions.

Men had been forced to resign and go back to Harvard for less. So all

Settling with that North African guy

contented themselves with glowering until tempers settled.

"I move we forget Qaddafi, Qadhafi and Quaddafi, and go after this fellow Khadafy I've read about in The Daily News," said the man from the Justice Department.

"What does The Daily News know from foreign policy?" asked the C.I.A. man. "For foreign policy, you need Time, the weekly newsmagazine, and Time fingers our target for us, gentlemen. His name is Gaddafi."

"No, no," said the chairman. "The Financial Times has made the same mistake in London, but it's not Gaddafi that's such an ugly case. It's Gadaffi."

Everyone looked amazed. Could the chairman possibly be right?

"Yes, gentlemen," said the chairman. "Gadaffi is our man. Not Gaddafi. I have it straight from The Times of London."

"Then," said the White House man, "The Boston Herald is wrong in suggesting that the man who is itching for a good hash-settling is named Khadafi."

Vice President Bush wanted to say that as a reader of both Newsweek and The Village Voice he thought they ought to go after that fellow Kaddafi, but he didn't.

He was afraid the papers would say "Hush-Hush Hash Bash Bunch Squashes Bush's Hunch." □

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